

ERIE-NIAGARA REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP
INSTITUTE FOR LOCAL GOVERNANCE AND REGIONAL GROWTH
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Hon. Barry Weinstein, MD

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Hon. Mark Schroeder
Hon. Demone Smith
Hector Titus
Charles Webb
Peter Wendel
Lawrence Witul

Minutes of Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership Meeting
July 25, 2003

Present: O'Connor, Weinstein, Burmaster, Eldridge, Ellis, Ferraro, Morse, Nasoff, Titus, Witul, Casale, Rosenwasser, Sheffer (proxy)

Excused: Allen, Blanchard, Boody, McMahon, Meckler, Rubin, Schroeder, Wendel

Absent: Cusack, Davignon, Fisher, Granieri, Larson, Lawson, Lehman, Meal, Roberts, Smith, Doolittle, Geiger

The meeting was called to order at 8:35 a.m. by Erie-Niagara Regional Partnership Co-Chair Barry Weinstein, MD. (Co-Chair Sean O'Connor joined the meeting in progress.)

Ad Hoc:

Michael Casale
Tim Doolittle
Richard Geiger
David Rosenwasser
John Sheffer, II

New ad hoc member David Rosenwasser, president of the Niagara Tourism & Convention Corporation, was welcomed. Minutes of the June, 2003 meeting were approved. Co-Chair Weinstein called attention to the section of the minutes devoted to the discussion with Mickey Brown of the Seneca Gaming Corporation. He also noted that a short-term resolution to the motor coach convention issue discussed at the June meeting has been achieved.

Administrator:

Tod A. Kniazuk

Subcommittee Chair Hector Titus presented the Economic Development Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed, with **approval granted to invite representatives of ESD and the ECIDA to give a presentation on waterfront redevelopment at the ENRP general meeting in September.**

Subcommittee Member Wright Ellis presented the Government Affairs Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed. On the topic of the Regional Economic Development Database (REDD), Buffalo Niagara Enterprise President & CEO Thomas Kucharski stated, "We can't let that thing die." He added that BNE needs to "step up" in terms of funding a portion of the REDD for 2004. A meeting of involved parties was to be

scheduled, and an update on REDD will be added to the September general meeting agenda.

Subcommittee Chair Robert Blanchard presented the Tourism & Culture Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed. Blanchard also gave an update on the Regional Cultural Tourism Initiative, inviting everyone to become involved in the project.

Subcommittee Chair Hal Morse presented the Transportation Subcommittee report. The report was received and filed. Morse also gave an update on the job development and public transportation pilot project. Suggested locations for the pilot project should be available for consideration and approval at the September general meeting.

President & CEO Thomas Kucharski and Executive Vice President Jerry Murphy gave a presentation on the efforts of the Buffalo Niagara Enterprise (BNE). Kucharski began by noting that not many projects are going on at this time due to a sluggish economy. About 80 percent of the deals they have closed are with small and mid-size businesses, creating fewer than 100 jobs per project.

In terms of the BNE's organizational structure, Kucharski noted that they haven't lost a single investor in the time he's been heading the organization. As they approach the last year of their original five-year commitments, there is still a lot of work to do on image remediation.

BNE will announce 21 deals this year – up from 10 in 2002. In comparison, Pittsburgh is announcing nine this year, and Baltimore is announcing four. They're small deals, but new companies are coming in to the area. The organization is aligned closely with the life sciences effort, with a paid BNE staff person on site at BuffLink. Other activities include a micro-loan program and a Canadian initiative.

As to the question of whether we are providing a unified front for economic development, Kucharski acknowledged that we still occasionally trip over each other, but 91 percent surveyed gave a positive response to our efforts.

ENRP Member Clyde Burmaster noted that it would be poor timing to lose either BNE or REDD now, especially when we've done the back work to be better positioned when the economy turns around.

Kucharski continued that the region needs spec space. We have the tool kit, but we need to change some of the business climate. He is confident, however, that we have positioned ourselves to “sell it, service it, and deliver it.” The BNE's mission is, “We market investment opportunities in Western

New York and broker customized responses to resulting project development.”

Due to the current economic climate, BNE has pulled back on some of their public relations efforts, but continue to do many familiarization tours and pitch stories to newspapers about our region. The repatriation portion of the BNE’s website gets 1.1 million hits per month, indicating that people are interested in coming back to the area.

The BNE aims to give companies responses to their requests in a timely manner, and that’s why REDD is important. The work ENRP is doing, along with the Regional Economic Development Strategy, are “critical” according to Kucharski. He noted, however, that we need to get more in the real estate community involved in REDD and Site Finder.

We need to have ready-made product in place that is immediately leasable, Kucharski concluded. In the long term this means brownfield remediation, but in the short term we need space. We also need to match up our efforts to the kinds of leads we’re attracting.

Addressing parts of Kucharski’s presentation, Co-Chair Weinstein noted that the opportunity to repatriate wanes as people’s parents die off, lessening their ties to the area. As to getting the real estate community involved, perhaps focus on one and make them successful, which should then attract others.

Weinstein inquired as to the funding picture for year six and beyond, and whether BNE has spent all their money for the first four years. Kucharski responded that they’re working on future funding by attempting to retain current funders and expand to others, but they are okay in the short term as they still have \$2 million that was held back deliberately in the first four years.

ENRP Administrator Tod Kniazuk gave an update on the Regional Economic Development Strategy. The SWOT analysis is complete, and moving on to the drafting of the strategy and mission statement. This work should begin in August. The Strategy is being integrated and coordinated with the Framework for Regional Growth and the Economic Development Working Group (One Stop Shop Group).

Mr. Subbiah Mantharam (proxy for ENRP Ad Hoc Member John Sheffer, II) updated the group on the electronic permitting pilot project. The project is on track. A functional pilot website is up, and was presented to the advisory committee on July 9. They are reviewing it and testing it, and also looking through the standardized application form, content, and other features. They will submit revisions by the end of August. The site will then

be ready for demonstration to other municipalities. Outstanding issues include e-signatures, attachments, and payment methods.

Co-Chair Weinstein offered that the project's ultimate goal is a standardized application process, and asked how far away we are from that goal. Mantharam replied that the pilot is using a common application that is part of the review process. At the end of August this application will be standardized for the pilot communities, and others would be asked to buy in to that application as they join the effort.

ENRP Member Jo Nasoff noted that municipalities have different levels of sophistication, meaning some have more restrictive codes, different levels of professional staff, or other differences. Will codes be changed to make them more uniform, and how will municipalities use this site? Mantharam responded that each municipality will be linked to the site, and that there has been talk in the pilot group of addressing uniform codes. Burmaster added that part of this needs to be an educational process to get municipalities to update and standardize their codes. Weinstein agreed, but offered that at least under this project the bulk of the application forms can be standardized.

ENRP Member Samuel Ferraro gave an update on the Framework for Regional Growth. Two rounds of stakeholder interviews have been completed, and the powers and authorities portion is close to completion. The Regional Economic Development Strategy will be folded in as the economic development portion of the Framework. Completion is in Fall 2004, but various reports will be released in advance of this date. Kniazuk added that HOK, a consultant on the Framework, noted that ENRP is the closest thing to a regional planning group in the two counties.

Ferraro also gave an update on power relicensing. Public hearings on scoping document number one will be held in August. The group will now focus of the settlement process, beginning in late fall. They will then re-engage the subcommittees for review of the studies.

Under old and new business, Ferraro noted that the deadline for a Niagara County agriculture project under the quick cool initiative is approaching, and that the Niagara County Farm Bureau has requested an extension. **The matter was referred to the Economic Development Subcommittee.**

Also under old and new business, Co-Chair O'Connor invited everyone to attend a "Welcome Back to the Troops" event on August 16.

Janique Curry, Continuing Education and Community Relations Specialist at Buffalo State College, introduced herself to the group. She

found our website and filled out a Local Governments Forum questionnaire, and would be interested in working with ENRP on regional education matters.

The next meeting will take place Friday, September 26 at 8:30 a.m. in Niagara County at the First Niagara Bank Offices (6950 S. Transit Road, Lockport). The meeting was adjourned at 9:50 a.m.

Submitted by Tod A. Kniazuk
September 19, 2003